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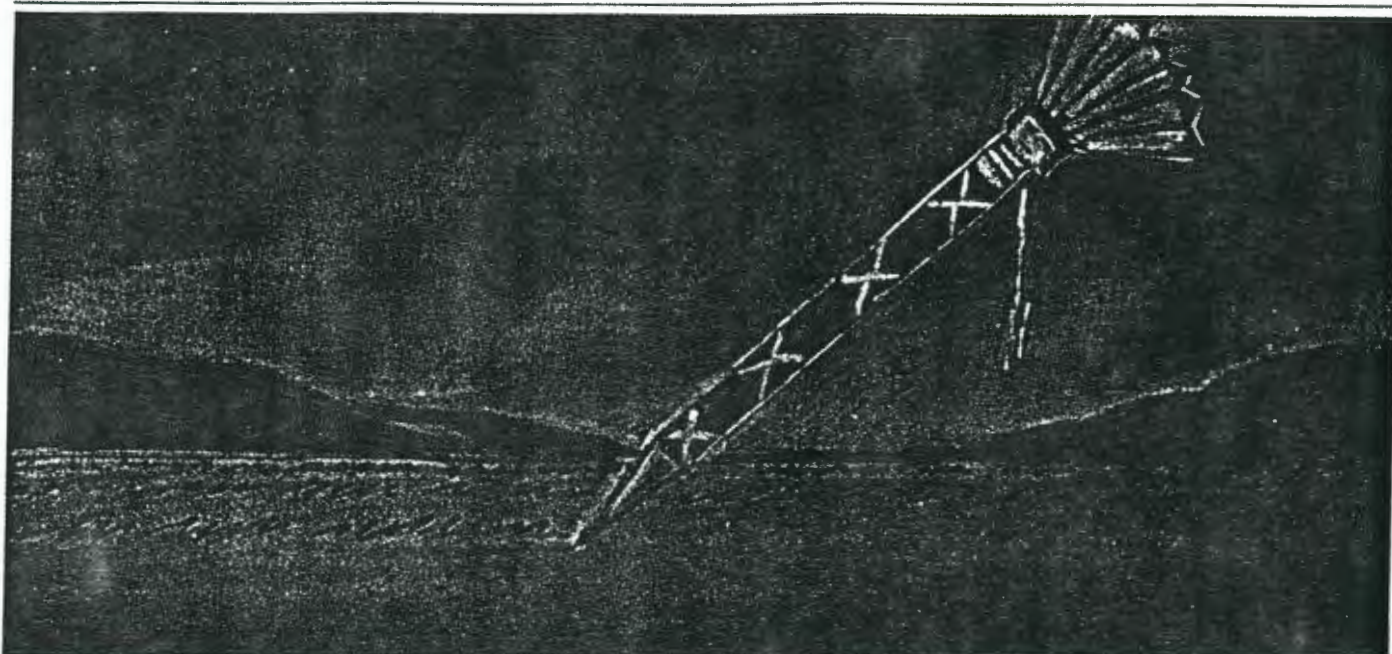
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Gadugi: A Model of Service-Learning for Native American Communities



Mr. Hall shows how, by combining the best of the education reform movement with traditional Native American values, the National Indian Youth Leadership Project has pioneered the spread of service-learning into Native American communities.

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BY McCLELLAN HALL

MANY OF THE concepts that are the foundation of the outdoor/experiential education movement — service-learning, self-directed learning, mentoring, challenge-based learning, and so on — have parallels in Native American traditions. The National Indian Youth Leadership Proj-

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ect (NIYLP) has identified and implemented several traditional Native American approaches to teaching and learning that both affirm the group identity of our people and can help rebuild our communities through the efforts of our young people.

One example of a Native American concept that can be usefully developed by the schools is the Cherokee tradition of *Gadugi*. Among the *Tsa-la-gi* (Cherokee) people, the call for a *Gadugi* is a call to

bring people together to help one another, much as the early European settlers came together for barn raisings. As Cherokees, we are connected to one another through a clan system that defines our relationships. This system of interdependence and mutual obligation has helped us maintain our identity and culture to the present day, and similar concepts exist in all Native American traditions. For example, Bernie Bearskin of the Winnebagoes was quoted by Studs Terkel as saying, "I think that perhaps my early training in the home impressed me with the philosophy of our forebears. It was taught to us that if one could be of service to his people, this is one of the greatest honors there is."*

For young people to become involved

*Studs Terkel, *Division Street, America* (New York: Avon Books, 1967).

in service to others is thus a natural extension of Native Americans' traditional sense of communal responsibility. At the same time, learning through providing service to others can be a significant step toward breaking the cycle of dependence in which many Native Americans feel themselves trapped.

Service-learning has been a key ingredient in the evolution of the NIYLP as a model program in Native American communities. The group of people who would later form the nucleus of the NIYLP came together in 1981 in north-eastern Oklahoma, where dropout rates for Cherokee students were as high as 70% in some public school systems. In those early discussions, we were confident that the traditional Native American concept of "leader as servant" would work well with the idea of service-learning to help reunite the Cherokee people in the 14-county area that makes up the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. We weren't at all sure that contemporary Cherokee young people would recognize and accept such traditional values and commit themselves to this unique effort. Nor were we sure how such traditional values could be made relevant to and practiced in the 1980s and beyond. However, we were optimistic that it could be done, and the spiritual leaders of the Cherokee Nation encouraged our efforts.

As director of the Cherokee Nation's alternative high school from 1981 to 1983, I spent many hours in conversation with Cherokee spiritual leaders — primarily Crosslin Smith, grandson of Redbird Smith, hereditary Chief of the Keetoowah Cherokees (an extremely traditional faction of the tribe that still practices the ancient religion). In response to my concerns about what was happening

to contemporary Cherokee youth, Crosslin replied that long ago the spiritual leaders had fasted and gone through prayer and rituals to see into the future and had already seen this situation coming. The lesson I drew from this discussion — though it was never articulated — was that we should view the plight of our young people as a challenge and see what could be done, rather than accept it as something beyond our control. From these conversations, the NIYLP philosophy began to take form.

In the early 1980s none of us had heard of Kurt Hahn and William James, and we were only vaguely aware of the experiential education movement. But we didn't have to look far for examples of the service ethic.

Before she became Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Wilma Mankiller was quietly attracting national attention through her work with self-help community service projects in isolated Cherokee communities. The most dramatic of these involved the tiny community of Bell, where local Cherokees designed and carried out a project that became a catalyst for bringing their community together. The project could have been done *for* the people (the approach usually taken by government agencies) rather than *by* the people, but that wasn't what Mankiller had in mind.

As is customary among the Cherokee people, a process of consensus building, in the form of a painstakingly thorough grassroots needs assessment, was undertaken in the community to find out exactly what the people felt were priorities. As it became evident that what people really wanted was running water in their homes, the skills and resources of the Bell residents proved to be impressive.

Wilma and her husband, Charlie Soap, were told repeatedly that the project wouldn't work. But when the families were asked to put in the hours required to bring the water lines to their homes, they did their share and more. Much more was actually accomplished than just the creation of a water system; a community based on the concept of *Gadugi* came to life.

A further challenge faced the founders of the NIYLP: how replicable would a model developed in Cherokee country prove to be with other tribes that have different cultures, governmental structures, and historical experiences? In late 1984 a small-scale project was started on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico to test the effectiveness of the model with southwestern tribes. Since 1985 the Indian Youth Leadership Camp has been held in New Mexico, and a number of tribes (Navajo, Zuni, Acoma, Laguna, Santa Clara, Hopi, Passamaquoddy, Colville, and Lakota) have taken part over the years.

Under the auspices of the National Youth Leadership Council, the NIYLP has also conducted similar camps in Native American communities from Alaska to Maine and has provided training nationwide in the basics of the model. As more tribes became involved and as the reputation of the project grew, the NIYLP was incorporated as a private, Indian-led, nonprofit organization and has been recognized by the U.S. Office of Indian Education as a model program.

TRADITIONAL VALUES FOR THE 1990s

The NIYLP focuses on key values common to Native Americans. We believe that these values can be practiced

today, in spite of the tremendous changes that have taken place in our tribes and communities. These critical values are listed and briefly described below.

Family. The most important unit in Native American culture has always been the family. In these times of rapid change and social fragmentation, special attention and concerted effort are needed to restore the strength of the family and to develop in young people a strong sense of commitment to family values.

Service to others. Service to others has been highly valued in Native American cultures from the earliest times. Cultivating the spirit of service and generosity

that we recognize the accomplishments and transitions in the lives of our young people. These turning points are often referred to as "rites of passage" and need to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Responsibility. As young people mature and as their roles expand, their responsibilities increase. A strong sense of personal responsibility is a vital element in the development of capable young people.

Natural consequences. Young people need to understand that actions are followed by consequences. Nature is often the best teacher, and young people must not be overprotected from reality.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES CAN PROVIDE A LEGITIMATE WAY TO REINTEGRATE ALIENATED STUDENTS.

provides young people with an opportunity to transcend self-centeredness, to develop genuine concern for others, and to put into action positive attitudes and skills. Service permeates the approach of the NIYLP.

Spiritual awareness. Traditional spiritual teachings of Native Americans often complement many Christian beliefs (e.g., the belief in a supreme being, in the concept of brotherhood, in the existence of a moral code, in the value of prayer and fasting, and so on). In modern times, a return to spiritual values — be they Christian or traditional — will provide young people with a constant source of inner strength, self-knowledge, love for others, and the feeling of gratitude for the gifts of life.

Challenge. There is value in involving young people in risk-taking activities that call on them to tap their sources of strength and to stretch their capabilities. In such activities, they experience directly the relationship between their own performance and success or failure.

Meaningful roles. Young people must have meaningful roles in the life of the family and the community if they are to develop positive social skills and a sense of self-worth.

Recognition. It is critically important

Respect. In order to develop a sense of their relationship with the universe, young people must learn to respect the traditions, values, and customs of their heritage, as well as those of other individuals, generations, races, and cultures.

Dialogue. Traditionally, there was a high level of intimate communication between adults and the young in Native American culture, and this contact provided a strong foundation for a child's education. The key to getting the most from learning experiences is "processing" those experiences through meaningful dialogue. Talking about *what* happened, analyzing *why* it's important, and generalizing to determine *how* we can learn from the experience helps young people to internalize the lessons of their experience and thereby to become empowered to apply them in other situations.

SOME EXAMPLES

Our research has identified alienation and social isolation as contributing factors in the cycle of substance abuse and school failure into which all too many young Native Americans fall. Service opportunities can provide a legitimate way to reintegrate alienated students.

I once took a group of three boys and

three girls from the Cherokee Nation alternative school to visit Anna, an elderly woman of mixed blood, who lived alone several miles from Stillwell, Oklahoma. She grew a large strawberry patch, raised cattle that her son looked after, and did some trapping. When we arrived, we decided first to split and stack firewood for her, since it was fall and starting to get cold at night. After some time had passed, I realized that the three girls had wandered off. We finished our splitting and took the load of wood to the house to stack it in the yard. When I went inside, I found the three missing students sitting at the table engaged in lively conversation with Anna.

These three girls were known for fighting and stealing and generally had very negative reputations in the community. They had been expelled from the public school and had been recruited by the alternative school. In this setting, however, they knew intuitively that they could provide a much more valuable service than splitting and stacking firewood.

As we made ready to leave, Anna offered us \$5 to help pay for our gas. I explained that we couldn't take her money because we were volunteers. She insisted and slipped the \$5 bill into my pocket. As we began to move toward the door, the young woman with unquestionably the worst reputation in the group walked over to me, discreetly pulled the \$5 bill from my pocket, and quickly slipped it under the sugar bowl on her way out the door.

When we got back to school I gave her a hug and let her know how impressed I was with what I had seen. I think that day was a turning point for her, and it certainly restored my confidence in a group of young people that most community members had given up on.

There have been many success stories over the years as students have carried out a number of projects, including the following:

- Students assisted the Pueblo of Picuris in rebuilding a 250-year-old adobe church. In one day, we made nearly 1,000 adobe bricks by hand, mixing straw and mud, pouring the mixture into molds, and cleaning molds — and we transported about 3,000 dry bricks to the church site.

- Students painted the administrative offices of the Jemez Pueblo Social Ser-

vices complex, including the governor's office. One group taught songs and games to children in a summer lunch program while the larger group painted.

- Students worked for the National Park Service at El Morro National Monument, repairing existing trails and building new ones, cleaning and weeding the Anasazi ruins, working to contain erosion on trails, and so on.

- In 1988 our entire camp group (approximately 80 people) went to Canyon de Chelly, one of the most scenic locations on the Navajo reservation. Our Navajo guide told stories about the history of the canyon, including the infamous roundup of the Navajos by Kit Carson and the U.S. Army in the 1860s. We heard about the burned houses, the trampled corn fields, and the fruit trees chopped down in an attempt to drive the Navajos from the canyon. One student came up with the idea that we should begin to replant peach trees in the canyon to make up for Kit Carson's destruction. That year we began with a single peach tree, and we have continued the tradition ever since.

YEAR-ROUND PROGRAM

At the request of school administrators, parents, and students, the NIYLP has evolved into a year-round program, with our camp serving as the "ignition" experience. While at the camp, the students learn valuable skills and plan projects that they can implement in their home communities during the school year. A teacher or another adult must accompany students to the camp, where the adults go through an intensive orientation to the model to prepare them to work with students in the follow-up program.

NIYLP staff members serve as facilitators in an effort to cultivate volunteers from among the parents and others in the home communities. Incoming sixth-graders take part in the Pathfinders program, which uses a skill-building and prevention approach; seventh- and eighth-graders focus on "leadership for service"; high school students are currently testing the Community Response Corps in the Zuni Pueblo. The high school program works cooperatively with the United World College to offer search and rescue training and training for service with volunteer fire departments. Training for

parents and inservice training for teachers are also provided by the NIYLP. The Zuni Youth Council provides an opportunity for young people to have genuine input into programs in their community.

AT THE REQUEST OF SCHOOL ADMINIS- TRATORS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS, THE PROJECT HAS EVOLVED INTO A YEAR-ROUND PROGRAM.

One of our long-range goals is to develop a core group of Native American youths who have attended our camps and are positive role models who can serve as staff members and leaders. At present, our key "service staff" members are all former participants with an average involvement of three years. One student, who attended our first camp in 1983 as

an eighth-grader, will graduate from the University of Notre Dame in the spring of 1991 and plans to join our full-time staff.

Currently we have projects under way in the school systems in Ramah (Navajo) and in Zuni, Acoma, and Santa Clara Pueblos in New Mexico, plus a new project on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Our projects are both school- and community-based and operate only in communities to which we have been invited.

To support our efforts to introduce service-learning into schools serving Native American students, NIYLP works collaboratively with the National Youth Leadership Council under a grant from the Kellogg Foundation. Also under this grant, we are working closely with the American Indian Science and Engineering Society to provide teacher training. Initially, a small number of teachers, NIYLP staff members, and a group of respected Native Americans will come together to develop a curriculum that will then be used to train teachers who will go back to teach in Indian communities.

The NIYLP has pioneered the spread of service into Native American communities, and we are confident that our traditional values — key concepts that once held our tribes and communities together — will combine with the best efforts of the education reform movement to offer our young people what they deserve: the best of both worlds. ☐

